

# the Great Prosperity: 2020 - 2050

*After the Death of the Consumer Economy*



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## Our Consumer Economy has run its course.

The 20th century ignited an accelerating consumer binge we can no longer sustain. Overconsumption shackles us to immoderate consumer debts, Federal deficits, trade imbalances, inequality of income and wealth, runaway speculation in real estate and stocks, insecure social security, plunging business ethics and environmental degradation. The pursuit of immediate gratification plays a role in rampant obesity and uncontrollable medical costs. And as we burn oceans of oil and mountains of coal, global warming imperils the planet.

In the 21st century, the consumer's rallying call "what's in it for me" is increasingly overshadowed by "what's in it for us." Unbridled materialism is slowly yielding to the satisfactions of defending the community—assuring full employment, preventing global warming, protecting the environment. A new society and economy is emerging. Call it the Green Economy.

When We the People seek redemption from evils of excess, we search for new meaning and direction. A transformation changes our society and economy.

After 1790, the first transformation in U.S. history (from what's in it for us to what's in it for me) sent dirt-poor farmers to nearly free land in the Mississippi Basin. The paradigm was clear. Take care of Number One. Own your very own piece of Valley land—no matter how small. Stay out of big cities. Prize your independence.

After 1845, the second transformation (from me to us) introduced a new vision. In a world mad with nationalistic ambitions, Americans now sought to make the nation the foremost industrial power. Us power. Millions migrated to rapidly growing cities surrounding Chicago.

After 1900, and especially after World War II, the third transformation (from us to me) opposed further industrialization and launched the Consumer Economy. The new paradigm reprogrammed attitudes from saving to spending, from waiting and sacrificing to consuming. Our elders well remember the sexy young women, smiling from the billboards, urging strait-laced and penurious citizens to save less and spend more. Buy, buy, buy, screamed the advertisers. Buy Coca Cola and be happy. Buy Dentine gum and be kissable. Buy Camels and be manly. The Consumer Economy blossomed. Houses grew bigger and more lavish, cars roomier, faster, more comfortable. What a great time to be alive.

Emerging since the 1960s, the fourth transformation is turning us away from consumer appetites to concern for the community—from me to us.

A great divide separates 2008 from the values and beliefs of only three years earlier. In 2004, a Gallup Poll editor reported that the public is "practically dozing" on global warming (April 20, 2007, Lydia Saad). Three years later, in 2007, polls showed that 88 % of Americans now believe that global warming threatens future generations and 75 % recommend taking immediate action to help the environment. (TIME magazine/ABC News/Stanford University, June 2007.)

The facts didn't change. We did.

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